Ritual and Redemption in the Narrative of Father Isaac Jogues (1643)

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I

Although captivity narratives are often associated with the Indian frontier of the American colonial period, the confinement experience is not exclusively characteristic of Anglo settlers of the North American contact zone. Reflecting the turbulent history of the Americas, the French presence was also shaped by the Indian encounter.

Following Giovanni da Verrazzano's exploratory travels along the Eastern Seaboard in 1524, Jacques Cartier mapped the Gulf of St. Lawrence and reached present day Quebec in 1542. One of the first episodes of the Anglo-French rivalry was the English attack on French settlements in 1629. Subsequently, the French began to reorganize their commercial interests along the St. Lawrence River. Cardinal Richelieu, chief minister to King Louis XIII formed the Company of New France and the Jesuits were provided monopoly in missionary work, while functioning as negotiators in the fur trade as well. The missionary efforts were primarily directed at the Hurons, a sedentary agricultural people fulfilling an intermediary function in the fur trade.(Pollack in Heath Anthology). Pushed into the region between Lake Erie and Lake Huron by the Iroquois the Huron maintained good relations with the French and were bitter enemies of the Five Iroquis Nations (Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Seneca, and Onondaga). One example of the ongoing intertribal conflict was the "mourning wars "of 1642.

French colonization in North America gained additional impetus when Samuel de Champlain established new colonies in Acadia (Nova Scotia) and Quebec in the early seventeenth century. In 1609 he attempted

to expand the boundaries of New France southward from Quebec. Along with his Huron and Ottawa allies he participated in a skirmish with the Iroquois, and the incident gave rise to inter-tribal hostilities plaguing New France until its end. The primary motivating forces of the French colonial drive included the fur trade and religious conversion assigning Jesuit missionaries and their Indian charges a crucial function. The former, however, not only "deplored the crass exploitation of Indians, but unlike their English counterparts '(they) were not determined to strip their converts of all vestiges of Indian culture" (Tindall 14). Consequently, foregoing Spanish and English designs of economic and cultural de-territorialization, the French Crown mainly regarded the colonies as a source of the much sought-after pelts. While the sparsely populated lands could not compete with the success of the English in North America, in comparison the French maintained friendlier relations with Native Americans.

Documenting the progress of the conversion effort Jesuit missionaries had to fulfill a strict administrative regimen in the form of annually filed reports submitted to their superiors either in Quebec or Montreal. Prior to being forwarded to the Provincial the annual reports handed in between 1632 and 1673 were compiled into a journal or "Relation." The resulting *Jesuit Relations* became a significant source on the history, ethnography, and religious indoctrination of the natives of New France. The documents preserved by the *Jesuit Relations* can be divided into private and public categories, the first including confidential letters, the second consisting of synthetic accounts composed for publication. (Abe71). The purpose of the *Jesuit Relations* was not only to report on the conditions in Huronia, but to secure royal protection for the Huron mission, to gain financial support from the French nobility, and to inform the public about the evangelization process (Abe 77).

One of these reports describes the tribulations of Father Isaac Jogues subsequent to being captured by Mohawks. He was one of the most dedicated missionaries and the document perpetuating his Indian confinement bears the title: "Captivity of Father Isaac Jogues, of the Society of Jesus Among the Mohawks" (1643) [henceforth: "Narrative"]. Father Jogues' report is originally written in Latin and is addressed to Father Jean Filleau, the Provincial of the French Province of the Society of Jesus. The translated version of the Narrative was published in Boston in 1857 by John Gilmary Shea in a collection titled *Perils of the Ocean and Wilderness* ("Held Captive" 4).

Isaac Jogues was born in 1607 and at age 17 he became member of the Society of Jesus. Shortly after being ordained in 1636 he was assigned to the Canadian territory and served in the Huron country of Upper Canada until 1642. Father Jogues was one of the handful Jesuit missionaries in charge of converting the Indians between Cape Breton and the eastern edge of Lake Huron. The Jesuits made a significant spiritual and material investment in the conversion effort as they established five chapels in Huron territory by the late 1630s. (Pollack in Heath Anthology). Working among the Hurons and serving at St.Mary's (Sainte Marie) parish Jogues was tossed into the former's ongoing hostile rivalry with the Iroquois on June 13, 1642. Sailing on a resupply mission for his parish his canoeing party of "twenty-three souls in all" (Jogues 5) including 18 Indians and 5 French was ambushed by Mohawks at the north bank of the St. Lawrence River's North Channel.

While captivity narratives inspire a wide variety of research approaches including the examination of the documents' identity rebuilding capacity, the analysis of the deployed character development strategies, or the evaluation of the texts' culture projection function, the Jogues Narrative's emphasis on Indian rituals calls for a cultural studies influenced examination of said trope. The applied research apparatus among others utilizes René Girard's theory on the connection between religion and violence, Michel Foucault's concept of body politics, and Julia Kristeva's idea of the abject, along with Richard VanDerBeets's cyclical evaluation of the captivity experience.

II

Selected for the resupply mission Father Jogues accepted the assignment "willingly and cheerfully" (6). Captured as a result of the overwhelming Mohawk military dominance, he displays the acquiescent mindset so characteristic of the victims of Indian attacks:"I neither could, nor cared to fly. Where, indeed, could I escape, barefooted as I was? [...] could I leave a countryman and the unchristened Hurons already taken or soon to be?"(8) The beginning sense of resignation, however, gives way to a steady resolution to continue his mission amidst the trying new circumstances.

While during his captivity Father Jogues undergoes harrowing physical and psychological tribulations, and suffering from "hunger, and

heat, and menaces, the savage fury of the Indians, the intense pain of (our) untended and now putrefying wounds" (10) unbroken in spirit he continues to perform his priestly duties, baptizing, giving last rites and attempting to spread the Catholic faith. Jogues forced into the position of the Other, is victimized by such objectification techniques as being torn by Indian hands and nails in addition to losing his facial and cranial hair. Nor is he spared from the standard component of captivity experiences, the running of the gauntlet. Moreover, due to the fact that his captors march from village to village he is repeatedly exposed to this "welcoming ritual:" "We had now been for seven days led from village to village, from scaffold to scaffold, become a spectacle to God and to his angels" (19). He is not able to maintain his bodily integrity either as he is mutilated, losing his left thumb to ritual torture. In addition to his own suffering he is forced to witness the brutalization of his Christened Indian friends, and fellow Frenchmen as well. In spite of all troubles Jogues sees his suffering as a sign of being chosen for a function similar to that of the apostles: "The Almighty surely wished us to be somewhat likened in this point to his apostle" (16).

Furthermore, no physical pain or psychological threat can subdue him as "(his) spirit was haughty, even in fetters and death" (12). Moreover, he witnesses the workings of divine providence as he is saved of further mutilation and the ensuing certain death twice as a result of the intervention of a "supernatural power" (12). A potent demonstration of Father Jogues' mental resolve and psychological strength is his refusal to eat Indian food at the beginning of his captivity in order to avoid offering "to their fire and torture, a strong and vigorous frame" (13).

While the fasting, thereby taking his own body out of Indian control reinforces his physical integrity, he cannot escape being perceived the Other as his appearance: "baldness or thin hair, a shaved, or lightly covered head (becomes) an object of their aversion" (13). Although having been subjected to the gauntlet he is mutilated by a Christianized Algonquin woman, Father Jogues reveling in pain and distress considers his severed thumb a worthy sacrifice for ensuring the success of his mission. "Surely it is pleasing to suffer at the hands of those for whom you would die, and for whom you chose to suffer the greatest torment rather than leave them exposed to the cruelty of visible and invisible enemies" (15).

While Father Jogues escapes death his fellow captives among them the Christianized Hurons meet a grisly end. He is especially proud of the

pious resolve and unflinching stance displayed by the Huron chief, Eustace Ahatsistari during his gruesome death, and the "heroic charity" (20) of a Christened Indian, named Paul sacrificing himself to save the Jesuit missionary from further torture. Jogues also reports on the adoption of one of the Frenchmen as corresponding to Indian custom after demonstrating his courage he was allowed to continue his life as a member of a Mohawk family. The nadir of the captivity experience: "After so many a long day spent fasting, after so many sleepless nights [...] we sank into a state of helplessness" (20) appears to be a turning point as the physical torture tends to wane and the Indians start to feed their prisoners. Bodily harm is superseded by psychological intimidation as the captives are forced to live in the shadow of imminent death and execution.

The chance for freedom rises when the Dutch intervene on behalf of the prisoners, yet the Indians refuse the offered bargain. One of Jogues' companions, René suffers a martyr's death: "I not only love him as a brother, but revere him as a martyr—martyr to obedience, and still more, a martyr to the faith and to the cross" (24). Rene is killed for introducing the cross and the Christian sign to a Mohawk child. Jogues further risks his life in recovering the mangled and discarded body of his companion in order to give it a Christian burial. Despite all difficulties the missionary is able to locate the earthly remains of his colleague and commits it to earth. At the same time, the protagonist preferring death by his captors is actively seeking martyrdom: "it was a pain to live, a gain to die in such a work of charity" (24). It is reasonable to conclude that Jogues subconsciously envies the martyrdom of René as a highest honor a missionary can achieve. Yet Father Jogues's life is spared the third time when an older Indian prevents another attempt at his life.

Simultaneously with the improvement of his physical condition Jogues is given an opportunity to utilize his professional background. He not only satisfies the curiosity of his captors' regarding the Christian worldview, but "adapting [his] philosophy to their reach" (32) earns their respect demonstrated by an elder's comment: "Indeed, we should have lost a great treasure, had we put this man to death, as we have been so often on the point of doing" (32). Also, he continues to propagate the faith "for the village enabled [him] to make greater progress in the language, and to secure the salvation of infants and adults by baptism" (36). Witnessing the clash between the Indian discourse and the Christian one represented by the Mohawk worship of Aireskoi and the Redeemer

respectively, Jogues reassures his superior of the dominance of the latter:"that if, delighted by its appearance, they believed it to be a God, they should know that the Lord was much more more (sic) beautiful than it (32)". Thus despite displaying a more accommodating attitude to Native American spirituality, Jogues methodically refutes the tenets of Iroquois faith.

The physical torment experienced in captivity is coupled with spiritual and metaphysical anguish undertaken for the salvation of the whole captive community. Consequently, Father Jogues struggling with grief in relation to all of his "children" was elevated to figurative fatherhood of the recently Christianized: "while each of them suffered but his own pain, I suffered that of all; I was afflicted with as intense grief as you can imagine a father's heart to feel at the sight of his children's misery" (16).

Although torn out of the organizational structure of the Catholic Church, by baptizing dying Hurons "with rain-drops gathered from the leaves of a stalk of Indian corn" (17) and by carving a wooden cross Jogues recreates the respective physical setting and liturgical activities in the wilderness. It is noteworthy that while prior to confinement most captives tended to look at nature with aversion, the captivity experience modifies their hostile attitude. Whereas the forest signified danger for a sedentary settler, the continuously mobile captive finds spiritual shelter in the wilderness. Jogues confesses that "the village was a prison for me, I avoided being seen. I loved the wild wood, where I begged the Lord not to disdain to speak to his servant, to give me strength in such fearful trials" (27)

Having found a spiritual and psychological shelter in the forest, while meditating and reading the Imitation of Christ in front of the figurative altar made from "a majestic tree" (29) enables Jogues to make a symbolic identification with the Redeemer as tied up between two poles he appears to perform a literal "imitatio Christi:."I render thee thanks, O Lord Jesus, that I have been allowed to learn, by some slight experience, how much thou didst deign to suffer on the cross for me, when the whole weight of thy most sacred body hung not by ropes, but by thy hands and feet pierced by hardest nails"(18).

Forced in the position of the Other due to his physical appearance, religious conviction, and sorcerer image Father Jogues is blamed for the ill fortune of the tribe. While at the beginning of his captivity he did not display his dedication to his faith publicly, eventually his attitude to

religious activities changes as secret prayers are giving way to overt religious commitment earning him an abject-like status: "While thus an object of their enmity, I certainly suffered much from hunger and cold, the contempt of the lowest of the men, the bitter hatred of their women" (29).

Thus while he is figuratively discharged, expelled, rendered Other demonstrated by the invocation of St. Paul's Epistle I Cor. IV.11–13 "we are made as the refuse of this world, the off-scouring of all even until now" (32) , the expulsion process re-establishes his own identity as well. (Butler 375). The captivity experience leads to the reversal of the dynamics of cultural hegemony. As a result of the repulsion, the Mohawk assume hegemonic positions sanctioning themselves as the Subject, and the missionary is relegated into the status of the Object. This is also demonstrated by the prevalence of the Mohawk discourse over the Catholic one signified by the rituals held to honor the tribe's guiding spirit, Aireskoi, or by the blasphemous use of church vestments for clothing purposes: "One of them had made himself leggings of two of the veils used at mass" (31).

Despite all his religious fervor and dedication Jogues cannot help evaluating his captivity as a punishment for past sins and disloyalty to God: "With this came up the remembrance of my past life, stained with so many sins, and so unfaithful to God" (30). Approximately forty years later the same lament emerged in a Puritan captive, Mary Rowlandson's reports: "I then remembered how careless I had been of Gods holy time, how many Sabbaths I had lost and misspent, and how evily I had walked in Gods sight" (440). Throughout his captivity a change of self-image can be discerned as well. While in the first two months of captivity Father Jogues attempts to fulfill an action pattern set by Christ, the subsiding of torture results in the assumption of a new role model, St. Bernard the Hermit (31), also known as "the disciple of the trees of the forest," who through personal example was able to persuade numerous nobles to follow the teachings of the Church. in 12th century France. Father Jogues' disposition to the Indians also changes. After an older woman takes care of him and he becomes convinced of being spared from Death he starts to study the Iroquois language and teach the elders of the tribe. His previous dismissal of Indian spirituality as mere superstition gives way to a reluctant acceptance of his captors' faith. The initial self-imposed starvation is replaced by a somewhat enthusiastic appreciation of Indian fare: "such food, had hunger, custom, and want of better, made, I will not

say tolerable, but even pleasing." (34). In concluding his letter Father Jogues identifies a divine pattern or intervention behind his captivity, as his life was spared in order to spread the faith among the heathen. His dedication and commitment resulted in "baptizing seventy, children, young and old, of five different nations and languages, that of every tribe, and people and tongue" (38).

Rituals and descriptions of violent acts play a crucial role in the Jogues Narrative. While on the one hand virtually all elements of VanDerBeets' ritual image bank including cannibalism, scalping, and graphic brutality can be found in the text, the deployment of such tropes warrants further inquiry. Physically violent action without an overtly religious purpose includes the gauntlet, a procedure Jogues has to undergo repeatedly as his forced march takes him to several Indian villages making him and his fellow captives run deprived of all clothing between the lines of men, women, and children armed with clubs and sticks.

At first glance the denial of garment amounts to a significant humiliation facilitating the reversal of the well-known naked savage stereotype. Consequently, it is the white man, who is forced into the role of the despised ethnic and racial Other. The elimination of clothing at the same time eradicates any sign of purported superiority as well. Furthermore, despite its inherent violence the gauntlet signifies a certain form of acceptance along with implying the possibility of atonement for the crimes of the sufferer.

While one purpose of the gauntlet was to punish a representative of the cultural and geo-political enemy, it also serves as a test of physical and psychological endurance. Even the protagonist himself attempts to justify the cruelty of the captors: "And as it is the custom of the savages, when out on war parties, to initiate themselves as it were by cruelty, under the belief that their success will be greater as they shall have been more cruel, they thus received us"(10). Thus through their unwilling participation in the ritual the prisoners promote the welfare and community interests of the captors in a paradoxical manner.

Susan Mizruchi perceives behind rituals an attempt to overcome "a chasm between what is sought or aspired to and that of the historical present as ritual actors are always at a loss in relation to some prior moment of greater spiritual promise and communal coherence" (56). Thus as a means of coping with the unsatisfactory conditions of the present, rituals are designed to connect two chronological spheres. Moreover, rituals offer a psychological ploy to cajole potentially divine or

transcendental assistance in bringing about a solution to current problems. On the whole rituals promote community solidarity as well since the gauntlet provides a compensation for the potential military and war-related disadvantages of the Mohawk.

At this point René Girard's thesis on the connection between violence and the sacred can provide further insight. Accordingly, the scarcity of physical and psychological resources can lead to a mimetic crisis within a given community. One way of dealing with the spreading of unchecked mimetic desire, or "reconciling mimetic oppositions" is the allocation of the status of the "surrogate victim" (307). In the present case, success in war, or victory itself, is an item of contention among the Native American peoples. To assure a greater share of the sought after item or feature a scapegoat, or surrogate victim is selected. Thus the captives are subjected to controlled violence facilitating the relief of intra-tribal tension and the subsequent alleviation of the mimetic crisis. This way the subject of the ritual becomes the outsider victim assuming sacralized status. Consequently, being exposed to the gauntlet, Jogues became a sacralized victim, promoting the military or war-related success and social cohesion of the Mohawk.

Jogues' self-perception and self-description ("sank, born to a stage") (11) invite comparison to Foucault's submissive, or docile body concept as well. In a Foucauldian view submissive or docile bodies are products of power structures. The vulnerability of the individual in the "microphysics of power" intensifies during the seventeenth century setting apart the relationship between the state and the subject both from slavery and serfdom emphasizing the ownership of the body and feudal exposure respectively. The new coercive practices aiming at the processing and manipulation of the human body give rise to a "political anatomy" promoting not as much the capture of bodies by the power machinery but the control of their functioning" (186–190).

The captive missionary and his fellow prisoners deprived of any initiative or individuality virtually cannot be distinguished from the other spoils of war. Jogues reporting on the captives' initial plight "On the eighth day we fell in with a troop of two-hundred Indians going out to fight" (10) implies submission. The passive, submissive status of the captives is further indicated by such expressions as: "they received us, they fell upon us, I [...] most exposed to their blows sank" (11).

Father Jogues is certainly physically subordinated and placed under the control of the Indians. The mutilation attempts represent

objectification and corporeal manipulation. The free flow of blood during the rituals not only invokes similar practices of the classic age, but reinvigorates the community and turns it into an integrated entity. The spectacle and shared experience of participating in the gauntlet brought with itself publicity and sensory proximity. Thus in fact the whole tribe became one submissive body cajoled into beating another. In this case, however, it is not the state, but the respective belief system of the Indian tribe that becomes the manipulating force. The dynamics of the ritual: "first rendering thanks to the sun, which they imagine presides over war, they congratulated their countrymen by a joyful volley of musketry. Each than cut off some stout clubs in the neighboring wood in order to receive us. When , therefore, we landed from the canoes, they fell upon us from both sides with their clubs," (10–11) indicates this control. Jogues collapsing under the blows born onto the torture-stage "half dead, and drenched in blood" (11) not only becomes the objectified victim, but his presence intensifies the Indians' willingness to engage in more violence.

According to Mary Douglas rituals implying or transmitting a "restricted code" (qtd. in Wagner 143) of behavior can be further categorized into performative and transformative events. Transformative rituals promoting intergroup solidarity emphasize the moral aspects and the definite outcome of the act, (Wagner 143) while as Victor Turner argues performative rituals "transcend thought's verbal and categorical boundaries by enacting meanings that are interstitial to them" (qtd. in Wagner 145).

Accordingly, the Indian rituals commemorated by Jogues fall into the transformative category. The gauntlet requires the participation of the whole village expressing a community-wide condemnation of the captives. The violent welcoming on the one hand conveys a punishment for all the wrong suffered in the hands of people represented by the captives, on the other, it functions as a test of physical and psychological stamina. During the event the captives are naked, put on display, thus they are subjected to the dominant gaze. Consequently, submissive bodies turn into naked bodies caught between two discourses while embraced by neither one (Ma and Cheng 205).

Jogues' physical nudity is counteracted with a determination to fight against theoretical nakedness as his "Narrative" repeatedly emphasizes his loyalty to European, Catholic discourse. Stranded between two worlds Father Jogues contests the discourse of Indian mythology represented by the animistic belief in Aireskoi with that of Catholicism.

Being torn out of the homogeneous discursive universe of the Jesuit mission, he is forced to adapt to a ruptured discursive space (Ma and Cheng 203). The adaptation requires a new set of vocabulary designed to bring Christianity closer to Indians, even to the Mohawk captors. Furthermore, in a Foucaldian sense, considering the soul the prison of the body Jogues suffers both physical and spiritual confinement.

Albeit with some modification, the Jogues Narrative reflects the stages of VanDerBeets' cyclical interpretation of the captivity narrative. The classic Separation, Transformation, Return structure of the Death-Rebirth archetype can be recognized, yet, with a slight variation. While Jogues and his fellow travelers are ambushed violently, he decides to stay with his Huron charges and does not even attempt to escape. Although most captives lose their identity or die a symbolic death, Jogues continuing his original life and mission even with a greater vigor manages to preserve his own identity. The physical torture and the mental pressure represented by the ordeal stage cannot break him as he considers the experience a divinely ordered test. Reveling in pain he welcomes the opportunity to follow the path of the Savior as not only he re-constitutes the physical aspects of the Catholic Church, but presents himself as the reification of the Christ trope. The Transformation phase encompassing Ordeal, Accommodation, and Adoption is also far from completed as the physical tribulations strengthen Jogues' resolve to maintain his personal integrity and separateness from the captors. It is noteworthy, that he enters the accommodation stage only after his physical conditions improve. His fasting and outright refusal of Indian food gives way to a reluctant acceptance of Indian fare and a condescending view of Indian language and culture is superseded by a somewhat disinclined effort to learn the means of Native American communication. Moreover, foregoing the Adoption phase, the improvement of his treatment notwithstanding he would never consider himself integrated into the Mohawk tribe. Since he never suffered a metaphysical death he was able to protect all aspects of his personality. Likewise, the preservation of his spiritual and professional integrity along with his resolve to continue his mission after gaining his freedom elevates him beyond the status of the "redeemed captive."

III

As one of the earliest narratives of captivity the Jogues text foreshadows the confinement texts born of the encounter between the two races at the North American frontier. Unlike the staples of the genre, this text is written by a professional, with a clearly determined target audience. While urged by church officials and influential friends Mary Rowlandson and others commemorated their tribulations with a primarily heuristic purpose, the Jogues Narrative was not prepared for wider public use. Being a product of a Catholic missionary a comparison with similar works produced by his Protestant counterparts or church officials is in order. It is noteworthy that while Protestant texts such as Robert Eastburn's "Faithful Narrative" (1758) are preceded by an affidavit reassuring the reader of the identity of the author and contain tirades against the rival denomination, Jogues not only refrains from such comments, but gains his freedom by Dutch Protestant assistance.

Furthermore, in both cases the notion of sin is singled out as the primary cause of captivity. Eastburn considers sin in a general sense, while Jogues discerns moral and spiritual transgressions as instigators of confinement. Moreover, while Eastburn refrains from spreading his faith, Jogues seizes the opportunity to convert the heathen. Eastburn is caught in a ruptured discursive space as the Indians consider him the racial Other and the French view him the representative of their spiritual and geo-political rival. Whereas Eastburn hurls the charges of superstition at Catholicism, Jogues casts the spiritual life of the Indians in the same light. Eastburn's religious activities compared to the aggressive and assertive conversion efforts undertaken by Jogues. are rather defensive as withdrawing from Catholic mass or resorting to excerpts from Scripture he attempts to preserve spiritual integrity both on the micro and macro level. Also, while both protagonists are subjected to similar rituals, Eastburn escapes mutilation and does not become a sacralized victim, Jogues on the other hand, converts an Indian ritual into another, Christian one as he deems his torture and mutilation equivalent to Christ's Passion.

Consequently, Father Jogues considers his physical tribulations as the signs of his redemption, and demonstrated by his later return to Canada it provides him with additional motivation and a strengthened resolve. Being part of the *Jesuit Reports,* the Jogues text furthers macro-political considerations. Since the target audience is the royal court and the financially and politically influential nobility the primary goal is not

to warn the public of the consequences of straying from religious commitment, but to justify the material and spiritual investment into the Huron mission and thereby the whole colonization process.

While as a result of the interracial and intercultural encounter Indian captives in the North American frontier often assumed a "creole identity" (Bauer 666). Jogues remained in the position of the participant observer (Bauer 673). Nor is he writing at the margins of "imperial, Eurocentric geo-cultural imagination," (Bauer 667) as he is the representative of that very discourse. Also Father Isaac Jogues' life offers a modified confirmation of Anthony Pagden's interpretation of martyrdom derived from the word's Greek root as witness, signifying "a Christian hero who has 'seen,' but failed to persuade others of the authenticity of his or her vision, a pilgrim who has not returned" (qtd. in Bauer 673). Whereas Father Jogues certainly defended the credibility and veracity of his vision, his return and eventual death at the hands of the Iroquois put a tragic end to his pilgrimage eventually elevating him to the ranks of the saints of the Catholic Church.

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